

**CLAIMS**

1. A method of operating a combined information handling and food processing system wherein items can be conveyed between processing means while a computer system traces its position and preserves information representing its origination while the food is processed, said method comprising the steps of:
- storing a data set of a first type representing origination of an item in memory of a computer system,
  - conveying the item to process means for separation of the item into sub-items while the positions of the item and the sub-items are traced by the computer system,
  - selecting sub-items for a batch, and
  - assigning data from the data set of the first type representing the origination of the item to the batch.
2. A method according to claim 1, further comprising defining a data set of a second type which comprises data from the data set of the first type representing the origination of at least one item and an identifier identifying at least one batch for which at least one sub-item of the at least one item has been selected.
3. A method according to claim 1 or 2, wherein a first type of batches is formed from sub-items of items of a single origination.
4. A method according to claim 3, wherein sub-items of items of one origination are selected repeatedly for batches of the first type until a residual amount of sub-items from that origination is insufficient for filling one batch.
5. A method according to any of the preceding claims, wherein a second type of batches is formed from sub-items of items of more than one origination.
6. A method according to claims 4 and 5, wherein the residual amount of sub-items is selected for batches of the second type.
7. A method according to any of claims 2-6, wherein the data set of the second type further comprises information relating to the processing of an item or sub-item.
8. A method according to claim 7, wherein the information relating to the processing of the item or sub-item comprises information identifying a processing resource or facility which has been in contact with the item or sub-item.

9. A method according to any of claims 3-8, wherein the selecting of sub-items for a first type of batches is based on a selection criterion wherein sub-items are combined in a batch so that the weight of the batch is within a predetermined range.

5 10. A method according to any of claims 5-9, wherein the selecting of sub-items for the second type of batches is based on a selection criterion wherein the sub-items are combined in the batch so that the number of different origins of the sub-items is within a predetermined range.

10 11. A method according to any of the preceding claims, further comprising the step of packaging a batch in a package and assigning data from the first or second set of data to the package to indicate origination of sub-items in that package.

12. A method according to claim 11, further comprising assigning data from the second set of data to the package to indicate processing resources or facilities which have been in contact with sub-items in that package.

13. A combined information handling and food processing system comprising:

15       – a conveyer for conveying a food item to process means for separation of the item into sub-items,

          – a computer with memory, the computer being adapted to:

          – store a data set of a first type representing origination of an item in the memory,

20       – select sub-items for a batch, and

          – assign data from the data set of the first type representing the origination of the item to the batch.

25 14. A system according to claim 13, adapted to define a data set of a second type which comprises data from the data set of the first type representing the origination of at least one item and an identifier identifying at least one batch for which at least one sub-item of the at least one item has been selected.

15. A system according to claim 13 or 14, adapted to form a first type of batches from sub-items of items of a single origination.

30 16. A system according to claim 15, wherein sub-items of items of one origination are selected repeatedly for batches of the first type until a residual amount of sub-items from that origination is insufficient for filling one batch.

17. A system according to any of claims 13-16, adapted to form a second type of batches from sub-items of items of more than one origination.

18. A system according to claims 16 and 17, adapted to select the residual amount of sub-items for batches of the second type.

5 19. A system according to any of claims 14-18, wherein the data set of the second type further comprises information relating to the processing of an item or sub-item.

20. A system according to claim 19, wherein the information relating to the processing of the item or sub-item comprises information identifying a processing resource or facility which has been in contact with the item or sub-item.

10 21. A system according to any of claims 15-20, wherein the selecting of sub-items for a first type of batches is based on a selection criterion wherein sub-items are combined in a batch so that the weight of the batch is within a predetermined range.

15 22. A system according to any of claims 18-21, wherein the selecting of sub-items for the second type of batches is based on a selection criteria wherein the sub-items are combined in the batch so that the number of different origins of the sub-items is within a predetermined range.

23. A system according to any of claims 13-22, further comprising packing equipment for packaging a batch in a package and for assigning data from the first or second set of data to the package to indicate origination of sub-items in that package.

20 24. A system according to any of claims 13-23, further comprising a set of electronic tags and means for transferring data between the computer and the tags, the system being adapted to receive information from one primary tag and transfer the data to a number of secondary tags, said number corresponding to the number of sub-items arising from the separation of the food item.

25 25. A system according to claim 24, further comprising a meat item separation device which is controlled by the computer to separate the food items into the number of sub items.